



**Praxis Labs Accelerator Culmination Event
April 9 2012
The Green Room of The Mellon Auditorium - 1301 Constitution Ave NW**

Context:

"[Praxis](#) is a mentorship-driven accelerator program for social entrepreneurs & innovators compelled by their faith to advance the common good. Over a one-year period, Praxis Fellows are provided with the knowledge and network needed to develop world-class organizations."

The Accelerator program focuses on 4 significant areas for organizational growth: mentorship, peer community, action oriented content, and access to capital. The list of mentors in the network is a veritable who's who in terms of current and highly visible Christian leaders.

The culmination event is the closing of the year long accelerator program and is the evening before the Q conference starts, also held here this year at The Mellon Auditorium. The Q conference is a TED-like Christian conference focused on believers engaging current cultural issues. Many people attending the culmination also attend Q.

The Accelerator program chooses 10 or 12 social entrepreneurial organizations, walks them through a coaching process of 12 months and awards funding to the top three finalists. The first evening the finalists are chosen, and the second evening, which is the first evening of Q, the top finalist is chosen. Much more background info is available at [qideas.org](#) and [praxislabs.org](#). This [link](#) also provides some good background info.

The audience seemed to be a good mix of young and old. The young were hip and ready to change the world, the old seem to be wise and have many varied financial resources. Everyone was well dressed and looked professional. The Mellon auditorium is a stunning venue.

My People:

I invited Trevin Hoekzema to attend with me, hoping that it might be a good networking event for him in his search for jobs after graduation in a few weeks.

Earlier in the day, I was at a diversity roundtable with various ministry leaders around the DC area. I met Drew Clyde for the first time face to face although we have exchanged emails and interacted on social networks before. He also went to the Accelerator event and is the pastor of missions and small groups at Church of the Redeemer, Gaithersburg. The three of us sat together.

Format:

We heard 5 minute pitches from 5 orgs. Each speaker was introduced by either Dave Blanchard, co-founder of Praxis or Jason Locy from 5 Stone, an Atlanta based design and

branding firm. There was a small panel discussion, which I found the most useful [see below]. We then heard 5 more orgs. We were given a chance to vote for 3 finalists via a text messaging platform. Our votes only counted for 25% of the vote count. The finalists were given cash awards for their organizations as follows: \$50K for #1, \$30K for #2 and \$20K for #3. The 3 finalists were announced at the end of the night with the #1 finalist scheduled to be announced the following evening at Q.

Interesting Orgs:

The orgs that made an impression on me included:

Matchbox Learning - focused retooling of the bottom 5% of elementary schools in America.

Rare Genomics - for people with the rarest of all diseases, connect next generation funding platforms with medical researchers to sequence their dna. then, tap researchers to research their specific disease. The founder of this has many ivy league degrees - he's hyper intelligent. He's also a TED fellow.

Ugive - a connection platform for high school kids to find volunteer opportunities.

Tegu - making kids toys using natural resources from Honduras.

Krochet Kids - crochet clothing that is sold in the US made from people in developing countries.

Biggest Bang:

The panel discussion was the most insightful for me.

Dave Blanchard - founder of Praxis, moderator

Josh Kwan - co founder of Praxis and director of intl giving at a family foundation

**Harry Kaestener - founder of Bandwidth.com and founder of Durham Cares

Steve Graves - executive coach

** Andrew Jones [tallskinnykiwi.com] and his family stayed at my house in October of 2010.

After they left, they went to visit Durham Cares and [visited](#) with Henry.

Kellan Dickens, good friend of Ember, is an MBA student at UNC Charlotte. Kellan is very involved with both Summit Church and Durham Cares in the homeless ministry space. Henry has hosted some roundtables with social entrepreneurs for grad students and next generation leaders. It's called Inklings in the spirit of CS Lewis and JRR Tolkien and Kellan has attended a few of these. He has great things to say about both these gatherings and the impact that Henry is making.

Some rough notes from the panel:

Henry Kaestner

God centered organization - faith, family, work, fitness in that order - Bandwidth.com has those very public values.

Important traits of leaders: why they do it and can they articulate the reasons why

Managing growth and scaling and organizational culture:

It is one thing to acquire and retain customers

another issue to retain employees

employee retention speaks directly about the culture of the org

how committed are the founders to creating the culture of the org - this is done with input and intention

culture is defined at the early steps of an org

Steve

scalability - better reason to scale than 'just because i can'
launch -> prove -> scale
you can skip the prove step with lots of resources - money, network, etc.
why do we scale? should we scale?
we must prove the right things, especially as people of faith
feed and nurture the person and the org
there is a composite score of life - husband, father, employee, neighbor
you must manage and lead yourself in multiple roles
live a life of healthy grace - juggle - realistic expectations

Josh Kwan

past investing has been based on guilt or feeling good about ourselves
calling, purpose, accomplishing impact - asking tough questions
social entrepreneurs are the 21st century missionary <<-- this is why I went

Connections:

After the presentations and the final vote, there were refreshments and the audience was highly encouraged to connect with both each other and the Fellows.

Trevin and I met the following people, giving away business cards every chance we got.

John Andrew - friend of Drew Clyde. Former financial advisor, now says he 'works in full time ministry.' His current project is managing the build out of a retreat center outside of Frederick, MD to be used for recovery type programs - post traumatic stress, human trafficking and Celebrate Recovery - and similar types of programs. I suspect that people find him and fund him when they need his expertise. He mentioned that there were two standing breakfasts in Montgomery County that Ember would benefit from attending. I plan to follow up via email at least.

Brian Swarts - Technical Advisor for the Salvation Army.

Byron Loflin - some kind of financial advisor and investor, working for a family foundation.

Jedd Schroy - exec dir of Paradigm Shift, one of this years Fellows. Trevin met him to learn more about South Africa, since he was there in 2010, and to perhaps connect him some of the people with Serve the City Stellenbosch. And also to see if there were potential career opportunities.

Observations:

I find myself constantly asking about sustainability and dependence now after reading Toxic Charity. It's become an important filter for me when looking at missions organizations, missions experiences and nonprofits. During the event, I found myself considering sustainability and dependence for each organization. I'm sure I'm not the only one asking and this is a good thing.

I also wonder about capital funding in the same manner. Although I'm sure this has been well thought out, it would be interesting to see some analysis on the success rate of Accelerator winners long term. The related principle is that everything you need for the harvest comes from the harvest [Luke 10 - take only a bag]. The idea of capital funding and grants seem to conflict with this idea.

Implications for Ember:

Our existing bucket of missionaries that may include untraditional missionaries is spot on. The future missionary looks much more like a social entrepreneur than missionaries from 40 years ago. We should keep encouraging this paradigm with the students that are entrusted to us. This includes encouraging the bi-vocational ministry model, [creative revenue plans](#) vs. the 100% support funding model and the missional imagination of the next generation leaders we work with.

The filters of dependency and sustainability are going to become increasingly important. Ember's projects, whether a weekend leadership immersion or a summer week long global exposure experience, will need to continue being vetted through these paradigms. Our primary model of catalytic leadership still works. Our mission experiences will continue to confuse those used to the traditional model of student mission trips. Dependency and sustainability will continue to be topics we discuss with students and participants in Ember Impact Coaching.

Conclusions:

The event was well worth it for Ember. If it is in DC again next year, we should send more people to do it. It is a low cost investment to help expose Ember and do some best in class learning about social entrepreneurs of the future.

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